

PUBLIC RITUAL AND THE PROCLAMATION OF RICHARD CROMWELL AS LORD  
PROTECTOR IN ENGLISH TOWNS,  
SEPTEMBER 1658\*

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ABSTRACT. The requirement to proclaim Richard Cromwell lord protector in September 1658 forced town leaders to engage with an unstable political context through the production of a large-scale public event. This article examines the ceremonies used in a range of provincial towns to offer a new perspective on urban culture in 1650s England. By analyzing both contemporary print and the records of civic government, it reveals how urban inhabitants could maintain a variety of performative responses to state directive whilst approaching the moment of succession actively and pragmatically to confront issues specific to their respective locales. Crucially, there was no standard ritual experience and civic authorities remained relatively free to modify existing codes and apply them in the way/s that made most sense to their particular situation. In addition to confirming the essentially ambiguous nature of ceremonial expectation in this context, the findings presented in this article complicate our understanding of urban government during the last months of the protectorate by emphasizing the capacity for towns of varied religious and/or political complexion to use public ritual to further corporate interests and negotiate a range of specific concerns in a national and a local framework.

Oliver Cromwell died at Whitehall Palace on 3 September 1658. It is unclear whether Richard, Oliver's eldest surviving son, was formally named successor by his father or if the decision was made posthumously by the privy council.<sup>1</sup> Either way, Richard was informed of his new position and proclaimed rightful heir after oath, prayers and blessing.<sup>2</sup> The order was forwarded 'to all the chief towns in the dominions of the Commonwealth ... to make the same public'.<sup>3</sup> Performing the proclamation in urban space necessitated some degree of ceremonial production. This article examines the ritual choreography used in a range of locations to offer a new perspective on urban experience in the last months of the protectorate. It reveals how, even amidst intensely challenging and unfamiliar circumstances, ceremonial performance could be utilized as a critical constituent of local government. Additionally, through the identification of substantial irregularities in the marking of Richard's succession, it emphasizes the relatively ambiguous nature of public ritual in the 1650s and contributes to broader debates on the long term cultural impact of civil war and republican rule in English towns.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Gaunt, 'Cromwell, Richard (1626–1712)', *ODNB*; Patrick Little and David L. Smith, *Parliaments and politics during the Cromwellian protectorate* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 152–3; Barry Coward, *The Cromwellian protectorate* (Manchester, 2002), p. 102; Jonathan Fitzgibbons, '“Not in any doubtfull dispute”? Reassessing the nomination of Richard Cromwell', *Historical Research*, 83 (2010), pp. 281–300, at p. 282.

<sup>2</sup> John Prestwich, *Respublica, or a display of the honors, ceremonies & ensigns of the common-wealth, under the protectorship of Oliver Cromwell* (London, 1787), pp. 204; Kevin Sharpe, *Image wars: promoting kings and commonwealths in England, 1603–1660* (London, 2010), p. 519.

<sup>3</sup> Prestwich, *Respublica*, pp. 204–6.

<sup>4</sup> Much scholarship here has been concerned with the extent of partisan allegiance and/or links to a broader 'county community' debate. For example, see Roger Howell, *Newcastle-upon-Tyne and the puritan revolution: a study of the Civil War in north England* (Oxford, 1967); Idem., 'Neutralism, conservatism and political alignment in the English revolution: the case of the towns 1642–9', in John Morrill, ed., *Reactions to the English Civil War 1642–1649* (London, 1982), pp. 67–87; Philip Styles, 'The city of Worcester during the civil wars, 1640–60', in R. C. Richardson, ed., *The English Civil Wars: local aspects* (Stroud, 1997), pp. 187–238; Patrick McGrath, 'Bristol and the Civil War', in R. C. Richardson, ed., *The English Civil Wars: local aspects* (Stroud,

Significantly, much existing scholarship on ceremonial activity in this context has concentrated on the changing form and function of religious rituals.<sup>5</sup> Despite being equally important and revealing, those practices associated with the translation of political authority into the localities have not received the same academic attention. This is surprising considering the centrality of ritual display to the processes of state legitimisation and the government of the provinces. Whilst studies have been undertaken to examine the importance of symbolic performance in political validation, these have been focused overwhelmingly on the figure of (Oliver) Cromwell and the actions of a select body of state governors. Moreover, the debate has been situated most firmly on the degree to which monarchical precedents were recycled and/or rejected.<sup>6</sup>

Republican authorities have been viewed as self-consciously ‘scripting’ and ‘directing’ public pageantry to replace ‘the gorgeous mythology of regal authority with a more forthright expression of the grandeur of state’.<sup>7</sup> Sean Kelsey emphasized how the Rump Parliament used the processes of spectacle and display to legitimize authority, ‘reaffirm unity’ and promote a distinctly ‘institutional character’.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, Kevin Sharpe has considered how the representation of political validity post-regicide necessitated the rejection

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1997), pp. 91-128; David Scott, ‘Politics and government in York 1640-1662’, in R. C. Richardson, ed., *Town and countryside in the English revolution* (Manchester, 1992), pp. 46-68. For the latter point see especially Alan Everitt, *The community of Kent and the great rebellion, 1640-60* (Leicester, 1966); David Underdown, *Somerset in the Civil War and interregnum* (Newton Abbot, 1973); John Morrill, *Cheshire 1630-1660: county government and society during the English revolution* (Oxford, 1974); Anthony Fletcher, *A county community in peace and war: Sussex, 1600-1660* (London, 1975); Ann Hughes, *Politics, society and civil war in Warwickshire, 1620-1660* (Cambridge, 1987). Investigations into the impact of contextual disruption have not yet considered the particular role of public ritual in relation to the mechanics of urban government and negotiation of political instability.

<sup>5</sup> Pertinent examples are Ronald Hutton, *The rise and fall of merry England: the ritual year, 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 212-26; Bernard Capp, *England’s culture wars: puritan reformation and its enemies in the interregnum, 1649-1660* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 110-131; Christopher Durston and Judith Maltby, eds., *Religion in revolutionary England* (Manchester, 2006); John Morrill, ‘The puritan revolution’, in John Coffey and Paul Chang-Ha Lim, eds., *The Cambridge companion to puritanism* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 67-88; Christopher Durston, ‘Puritan rule and the failure of cultural revolution, 1645-1660’, in Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales, eds., *The culture of English puritanism, 1560-1700* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 210-33.

<sup>6</sup> Sean Kelsey, *Inventing a republic: the political culture of the English commonwealth, 1649-1653* (Manchester, 1997), pp. 53-84; Laura Lunger Knoppers, *Constructing Cromwell: ceremony, portrait and print* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 69-106, 132-66; Sharpe, *Image wars*, pp. 445-52, 468-92, 512-25.

<sup>7</sup> Kelsey, *Inventing a republic*, p. 54.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. pp. 59, 73, 85. This was achieved through an impressive catalogue of public occasions including the celebration of military victories and ship launching on the Thames.

of certain monarchical forms and appropriation and/or modification of ‘the texts, images and performances that bequeathed authority to a new Commonwealth’.<sup>9</sup> Laura Lunger Knoppers underscored how Oliver’s state funeral assumed precedents associated with James I to ‘stabilize the contested forms and legitimate the regime’.<sup>10</sup> This particular ritual moment has been analyzed alongside the protectoral inaugurations of 1653 and 1657 as indication of a shift toward a more overtly ceremonial style of government with a proclivity for ‘quasi-monarchical power’ and its associated trappings.<sup>11</sup> Whatever the substance of their conclusions, it is evident that historians are now demonstrably attuned to the links between symbolic performance and the successive interregnum regimes.

Whilst lines of continuity have been delineated, however, it is important to emphasize that there were core differences in the nature of public ritual before and after the civil wars.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the particular predicament at the death of Oliver Cromwell remained unique. Not only were the precise logistics of the succession shrouded in mystery, but Richard was left ‘singularly untrained’ for his new position.<sup>13</sup> As a consequence, town governors charged with performing the proclamation in their respective locales were forced to negotiate an unprecedented interpretive context. Although this article does not take issue with the potential for the state to use the succession as a means of bolstering authority, it moves beyond a focus purely on the explication of central directive and instead stresses the decision making of local governors as its core constituent.

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<sup>9</sup> Sharpe, *Image wars*, p. 387.

<sup>10</sup> Knoppers, *Constructing Cromwell*, p. 136.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Rawlinson Gardiner, *History of the commonwealth and protectorate* (4 vols., London, 1903), III, p. 178; Roy Sherwood, *The court of Oliver Cromwell* (London, 1977); Idem., *Oliver Cromwell: king in all but name* (Stroud, 1977); Austin Woolrych, *Commonwealth to protectorate* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 145, 360; Sharpe, *Image wars*, p. 517; Knoppers, *Constructing Cromwell*, p. 136.

<sup>12</sup> Most obviously, the abolition of the episcopacy in 1646 and the House of Lords in 1649 altered the ‘imagery, mood and political content’ of state ceremonial which in turn became ‘much more secular, much less medieval’. For further discussion on this point see Jason Peacey, ‘The street theatre of state: the ceremonial opening of parliament, 1603-60’, *Parliamentary History*, 34 (2015), pp. 155-72, at p. 167.

<sup>13</sup> Coward, *Cromwellian protectorate*, p. 103.

This analysis contributes to a growing body of scholarship on the complex situation of towns in the 1650s between the growth of post-Reformation civic consciousness and the flowering of an ‘urban renaissance’ in the long eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Significantly, the identification of ‘civic survivalism’ following the crisis of civil war has enriched our understanding of the relationship between centre and locality and emphasized the continued capital of civic values within a wider national context.<sup>15</sup> Rather than maintaining a ‘parasitic’ relationship with state authorities, interregnum towns can be seen to have sustained a ‘symbiotic’ connection with the centre which enabled them to consolidate an assertive ‘civic republicanism’ through local reform initiatives and the demonstration of corporate power.<sup>16</sup> As Phil Withington and Ian Roy have shown, the ritual use of public space was a crucial way of portraying and defending this civic consciousness.<sup>17</sup> Building on this work, the evidence of Richard’s proclamation shows how corporate identity could remain eminently important in the context of the later 1650s. The response of urban governors to the moment of regime change stemmed from *local* experience and facilitated the expression and management of

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<sup>14</sup> Important studies for the earlier and later periods have been completed by Robert Tittler and Peter Borsay respectively. See Tittler, *The Reformation and the towns in England: politics and political culture, c.1540-1640* (Oxford, 1998); Idem., *Architecture and power: the town hall and the English urban community, c.1500-1640* (Oxford, 1991). With reference to the ‘long eighteenth century’, see Borsay, *The English urban renaissance: culture and society in the provincial town, 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> Phil Withington, ‘Citizens, community and political culture in Restoration England’, in Alexandra Shepard and Phil Withington, eds., *Communities in early modern England: networks, place, rhetoric* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 135-6, 137, 152; Kathleen Wilson, *The sense of the people: politics, culture and imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge, 1995); Jonathan Barry ‘Bourgeois collectivism? Urban association and the middling sort’, in Jonathan Barry and Christopher Wilson Brooks, eds., *The middling sort of people: culture, society and politics in England, 1550-1800* (London, 1994), pp. 109-12; Rosemary Sweet, *The writing of urban histories in eighteenth-century England* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 74-100. In relation to the sixteenth century, Tittler has explored the realignment of civic elites with state government to preserve the control of a select urban oligarchy. See his *Reformation and the Towns*. Barry has stressed the existence of an urban culture of association which provided a shared forum of values and practices for (a select group of) local residents. See his ‘Bourgeois collectivism?’, pp. 84-113; Idem., ‘Bristol pride: civic identity in Bristol, c.1640-1775’, in Madge Dresser and Philip Ollerenshaw, eds., *The making of modern Bristol* (Tiverton, 1996), p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> Phil Withington, ‘Views from the bridge: revolution and Restoration in seventeenth-century York’, *Past & Present*, 170 (2001), pp. 121-51, at p. 135; Ian Roy, ‘The English republic, 1649-60: the view from the town hall’, in *Schriften des historischen kollegs kolloquien II. republiken und republikanismus im Europa dem frühen neuzeit* (Oldenburg, 1985), pp. 234-7; Ann Hughes, ‘Coventry and the English revolution’, in R. C. Richardson, ed., *Town and countryside in the English revolution* (Manchester, 1992), p. 89.

<sup>17</sup> Withington, ‘Views from the bridge’, p. 141; Roy, ‘English republic’, p. 214.

*local* concerns. At the same time, it also presented a practical vocabulary for negotiating some of the more challenging aspects of the urban/state connection.<sup>18</sup>

Through an examination of the ceremonies represented in both civic records and contemporary print, the proclamation of Richard Cromwell is thus situated within a wider history of interregnum urban experience and used to expose a level of involvement markedly absent from previous studies. The discussion which follows reveals how local authorities could celebrate for more nuanced reasons than a one dimensional adherence to national directive. Despite differences in the towns themselves and the symbolic performances that they chose to employ, ritual orchestrators demonstrated that it was resolutely *worth* staging an expensive and unstable public event as a means of confronting issues specific to their respective locales. Far from a simplistic rehashing of monarchical precedent or a straightforward indication of partisan support, the urban response to Richard's accession reveals the continued vitality of ritual culture in the republican town and emphasizes the agency of those inhabitants who shared in its performance.

## II

Before unpacking the ceremonial experience of the proclamation, it is first necessary to give a brief overview of the political context which led to the proposed settlement. Prior to the spring of 1657, Oliver Cromwell had 'deliberately neglected' to prepare his eldest son Richard 'for any role in politics or war'. Following the signing of the Humble Petition and Advice, however, he was forced out of his quiet life as a Hampshire squire and onto the

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<sup>18</sup> Barry has outlined how, from the mid-seventeenth century, the state began to increase its presence in urban centres through 'tax officials and military men'. See his 'Provincial town culture', p. 204. Moreover, many towns faced 'legal and political chaos' following the granting of new charters and extensive removals and appointments of corporate members. For further discussion on this point see Paul Halliday, *Dismembering the body politic: partisan politics in England's towns, 1650-1730* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 62-3, 65.

public stage.<sup>19</sup> A prominent role was provided at Oliver's second protectoral inauguration in June 1657 and the following month Richard was elected chancellor of Oxford University with an 'elaborate installation ceremony' at Whitehall. By the autumn of 1657, he had been appointed member of the 'other house', the new second chamber of parliament replacing the House of Lords, and by December, occupied a formal position as member of the council of state. January 1658 saw further employment as commander of a cavalry regiment and in May Richard attended the launching of a ship named in his honour at Woolwich. Visits to Bath and Bristol in June and July further enhanced the impression of a rapid inculcation to political eminence.<sup>20</sup>

By the afternoon of 3 September then, Richard was far from an anonymous obscurity. Still, contemporary confidence in a smooth transition was limited. A Yorkshire blacksmith was arrested for 'saying th[a]t there was now noe Law, th[a]t euery man might doe what they List, & th[a]t wee might haue a Kinge'.<sup>21</sup> Royalist nobleman William Howard went so far as to deride Richard as an 'ape on horseback', undeserving of the 'pageantry of such solemnities as the occasion required'.<sup>22</sup> The moment of succession in this instance prompted speculation on the longevity of the regime and opened up the very real possibility of rebellion. Even the secretary of state John Thurloe's sanguine correspondence with Richard's brother and lord deputy of Ireland Henry Cromwell included the portentous caveat that 'there are some secret murmurings in the army, as if his highnes were not generall of the army, as his father was'.<sup>23</sup>

In spite of such palpable concerns, the ceremonies confirming the new head of state were duly performed in London on 4 September. Here, the 'illustrious Lord Richard' was

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<sup>19</sup> David Lawrence Smith, 'English politics in the 1650s', in Michael J. Braddick, ed., *The Oxford handbook of the English revolution* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 196-7; Christopher Durston, 'The fall of Cromwell's major-generals', *English Historical Review*, 113 (1998), pp. 18-37, at pp. 29, 36; Ronald Hutton, *The British republic 1649-1660* (Basingstoke, 1990), pp. 72-5; Sharpe, *Image wars*, p. 531; Idem., *The Restoration: a political and religious history of England and Wales, 1658-1667* (Oxford, 1985), p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Gaunt, 'Cromwell, Richard', *ODNB*.

<sup>21</sup> 'Justice's note-book of Capt. John Pickering, 1656-60', ed. G. D. Lumb, *Publications of the Thoresby Society: Miscellanea*, 15 (1909), pp. 71-80, 277-95, at pp. 278-9.

<sup>22</sup> Bodleian Library (Bodl.), Clarendon MS 58, fo. 288.

<sup>23</sup> *A collection of the state papers of John Thurloe*, ed. T. Birch (7 vols., London, 1742), VII, p. 374.

declared ‘rightful Protector’ by mayor and aldermen alongside the ‘citizens of London, the officers of the Army, and numbers of other principal Gentlemen’ who processed through city streets mounted on horseback and repeated the news in the Palace yard, Chancery Lane, Cheapside and the Royal Exchange.<sup>24</sup> Thurloe reported reassuringly on the ‘publick demonstrations of honour and chearfulness’, noting as a hopeful aside that ‘all the officers of the army proued as vananimous in it’.<sup>25</sup> Notwithstanding the fragility of the political settlement and the unparalleled nature of Richard’s situation, the staging of succession in the capital appeared to play out conspicuously smoothly.

From this point on, numerous accounts of regional ceremonies flooded the pages of newsbook *Mercurius Politicus* alongside multiple addresses of support from various corporations.<sup>26</sup> These latter texts were especially hyperbolic in their expression of grief at the death of the old protector and loyalty to the new.<sup>27</sup> It is not clear whether the production of addresses was deliberately coordinated. However, we do know that towns were aware of the contribution of other corporations and took great pains in drafting an appropriate response. Urban magistrates had to balance the time it took to craft their message with the potential prestige of quick delivery. Indeed, the corporation at Leeds sent their address in December, excusing their lateness (‘we have not been so early as others’) due to their distance from London and ‘want of a fit hand to present it’.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, the similarity between addresses is remarkable. Individual towns followed the same formula almost to the letter and were ‘uniformly lavish’ in the use of biblical metaphor to compare Oliver to Moses and Richard to Joshua ‘to naturalize and defend’ the transition.<sup>29</sup> With substantial anxieties over the competence of Richard and the exceptional nature of a protectoral succession, special effort

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<sup>24</sup> Prestwich, *Respublica*, pp. 204-6; *Mercurius Politicus*, 432 (2-9 Sept. 1658), p. 806.

<sup>25</sup> Bodl., Clarendon MS 58, fo. 332.

<sup>26</sup> *Mercurius Politicus*, 435 (23-30 Sept. 1658), pp. 885-6, 889-90.

<sup>27</sup> *Mercurius Politicus*, 548 (30 Dec. - 6 Jan. 1658), pp. 132-4; *Mercurius Politicus*, 557 (3-10 Mar. 1659), pp. 276-7.

<sup>28</sup> *Mercurius Politicus*, 546 (16-23 Dec. 1658), pp. 82-3.

<sup>29</sup> Knoppers, *Constructing Cromwell*, p. 137.



was made to promote an image of security and stability through the uniform invocation of extensive provincial support.

It is worth emphasising at this point that *Mercurius Politicus* was, in September 1658, the most powerful and prolific source of current affairs in the country. Founded in June 1650, the publication dominated the market for a decade, supplying domestic and foreign news and surviving stringent censorship legislation to remain the regime's official mouthpiece until both were dissolved in 1660.<sup>30</sup> At face value, the addresses which populated the pages of the newsbook appear to indicate a general civic acceptance for the choice of successor.<sup>31</sup> These texts, however, crafted as part of compulsory 'celebrations' and selectively reproduced by a state-sanctioned press, should be approached with caution. For one anonymous sceptic, the letters published in *Mercurius* were no more than fabrications hatched at 'court' by Thurloe and that 'old Malignant Pamphletter' (the newsbook's editor-in-chief) Marchamont Nedham.<sup>32</sup> If we accept these claims, the accounts represent little more than a targeted propaganda drive to foster legitimacy through the support of the government's most powerful adjudicators, the people. Still, it is unhelpful to dismiss this evidence as total falsification.

Whilst it is true that Nedham had a direct incentive to present the succession in a sympathetic light, we know irrefutably that towns *were* producing laudatory addresses and sending them to the new protector as a sign of their fidelity.<sup>33</sup> The noting of letters received and recorded in the state papers and the meticulous drafting of addresses from various corporations confirms that urban governors met to discuss how best to communicate their public 'support' for Richard.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, it is clear that local authorities were expected to

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<sup>30</sup> Jason Peacey, *Politicians and pamphleteers: propaganda during the English Civil Wars and interregnum* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 195, 228-30.

<sup>31</sup> Knoppers, *Constructing Cromwell*, p. 137.

<sup>32</sup> *A true catalogue, or, an account of the several places and most eminent persons in the three nations, and elsewhere where, and by whom Richard Cromwell was proclaimed Lord Protector of the commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1659), p. 53.

<sup>33</sup> Sharpe, *Image wars*, p. 532.

<sup>34</sup> For example, see Norfolk Record Office (NRO), NCR Case 16d/6, fos. 195v-196r; Gloucestershire Archives (GA), GBR/H/2/3, fos. 249-56; Helen Stocks, ed., *Records of the borough of Leicester being a series of extracts*

mark the occasion with a suitable set of rituals, however pragmatic their motives might be. For these reasons, the analysis which follows supports Sharpe's view that 'there is no reason to doubt' the basic legitimacy of these accounts or the ritual components that they convey.<sup>35</sup>

Of course, accepting validity does not solve the problem of how and/or why towns chose to mark the succession. The evidence of numerous congratulatory addresses suggests that civic authorities *were* actively utilising the occasion of September 1658 to curry favour with central government. In order to fully explore the motivations of local orchestrators, however, it is necessary to move past a focus purely on these formal texts sent from corporation to capital. The remainder of this article will examine accounts of the actual performances used to mark the moment of succession as represented in both contemporary print and the records of local government. We will begin with an assessment of a range of ceremonial responses from guarded to enthusiastic, before considering the potential for the occasion to be used by civic officers to further corporate interests in a number of more unique and complex ways. In each case, the rituals enacted will be placed within the specific context of local experience and analyzed in relation to the broader concerns of urban authorities.

### III

Performing the proclamation in September 1658 resulted in a diverse array of public rituals which mirrored attitudes to the new lord protector and the logistics of the political settlement. The tone of the ritual would be set by the dominant powers of the town and the organisation itself undertaken by members of the corporation. In certain instances, prominent individuals would assume a more central role in preparing and performing the ritual by drafting and

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*from the archives of the corporation of Leicester, 1603-1688* (Cambridge, 1923), pp. 451-2; R. P. Cruden, *The history of the town of Gravesend in the county of Kent and the port of London* (London, 1843), p. 321; J. H. Drury, *Historical and topographical notices of Great Yarmouth* (London, 1826), p. 328.

<sup>35</sup> Sharpe, *Image wars*, p. 532.

delivering speeches and/or leading processions.<sup>36</sup> Intervention from military authorities and church leaders also had to be accounted for alongside the unknowable quantity of more casual spectators. Whilst we do not have a simple answer to the question of who was responsible for organising the ceremonial activities of a particular town, then, we are able to use the moment of succession to gain an insight into the self-representation of the dominant corporate authorities in September 1658.

In certain instances, local governors demonstrated a more lukewarm reaction which they expressed through an apparent lack of ceremony. Many towns remained apathetic about the Cromwellian regime and, most likely, chose to mark the proclamation with minimum effort and expenditure. If challenged, they could cite short notice and limited funds to avoid accusations of political intransigence. Of course, the nature of source material here is especially challenging as those reports noted in *Mercurius* and recorded in the state papers were obviously designed to do political work as representations of harmonious transition. Despite these limitations, it is possible to gain insight into the potential for more negative responses which forwarded local concerns at the expense of a fixed model of political obedience. One such example can be found in the city of Chester where Richard was not proclaimed until 16 September. One of the only references to the marking of the succession in the surviving records of corporate and parochial expenditure here can be found in the retrospective accounts of churchwardens from the parish of Holy Trinity who bitterly noted in 1661 the payment of 2s. 6d. for ringing ‘when the L[or]d Protector died & scaped the gallowes’.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See discussion of Sir Thomas Widdrington in York below. See also D. Scott, ‘Widdrington, Sir Thomas (c.1600–1664)’, *ODNB; Public Intelligencer*, 142 (6-13 Sept. 1658), pp. 813-14.

<sup>37</sup> Chester County Archives and Local Studies, P 1/11, no fo. numbers. Holy Trinity churchwardens’ accounts, 1661 for 1658.

Chester's ostensible reluctance to enact and remember the proclamation is not surprising considering its reputation as a seat of deeply entrenched royalist sympathies.<sup>38</sup> Certainly, the city's projected identity throughout much of the early modern period was centred on public demonstrations of monarchist loyalty.<sup>39</sup> Following a lengthy siege and parliamentary takeover in 1645, however, the corporation was purged of its openly royalist members. A devastating plague epidemic in 1647 and the continued burden of financial recovery presented an especially challenging climate for the articulation of ritual codes into the 1650s.<sup>40</sup> Whilst there has been some debate over the extent of popular royalism in this context, it remains evident that core members of the corporation retained their reputation for intransigence vis-à-vis state authorities.<sup>41</sup>

Although we have to be aware of the possibility that a corporate response was orchestrated and the written evidence later destroyed, this example emphasizes the potential for substantial inconsistencies in local commemorations of the succession outside those represented in the 'official' accounts of contemporary print.<sup>42</sup> Still, the ceremonies confirming the new head of state were far from simplistic indicators of political support and towns that enjoyed a more favourable relationship with state authorities were equally able to maintain a more guarded response.

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<sup>38</sup> Gordon Colin Fawcett Forster, 'Civic government in Chester, 1642-1660', *Northern History*, 37 (2000), pp. 83-103, at p. 102.

<sup>39</sup> R. N. Dore has emphasized that Chester was largely committed to royalism from 1642, a factor that would naturally help to explain the reluctance of the corporation to commemorate the proclamation of Oliver Cromwell's son. Dore's argument challenges that of A. M. Johnson who maintained that the town would have demonstrated more of a neutral position if it was not for a coup led by a select body of royalist councillors. For further discussion on this point see R. N. Dore, '1642: the coming of the civil war to Cheshire: conflicting actions and impressions', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society* 87 (1991), pp. 39-63; A. M. Johnson, 'Politics in Chester during the civil wars and interregnum', in Peter Clark and Paul Slack, eds., *Crisis and order in English towns, 1500-1700* (London, 1972), pp. 204-36.

<sup>40</sup> Capp, *Culture wars*, pp. 224-5.

<sup>41</sup> Johnson, 'Politics in Chester', pp. 220-8; C. P. Lewis and A. T. Thacker, eds., *The Victoria county history of Cheshire: the city of Chester, general history and topography*, (London, 2003), pp. 121, 123.

<sup>42</sup> Indeed, a standard formal address was sent to the lord protector from 'several Justices of the Peace, Gentlemen, Ministers, and many of the Freeholders, of the county of Chester' in February 1659. See *Mercurius Politicus*, 555 (17-24 Feb. 1659), pp. 443-4.

A revealing example can be found with reference to Gloucester. This was a seat of great strategic importance and an established base of support for successive interregnum regimes. The town had backed parliament throughout the civil wars and had demonstrated a strong tendency toward godly independence in the 1630s and 1640s.<sup>43</sup> No member of the corporation was ejected for royalism at any point in the 1650s and seven aldermen remained in office from before 1646 until at least 1659. An established tradition of lay puritanism continued across the intervening years. Broadly speaking, these conditions provided a stable framework for local jurisdiction which saw magistrates move in conjunction with the state to further the goals of godly reformation in their town. It was for these reasons that Bernard Capp categorized republican Gloucester as ‘a model of effective co-operation between local and central government’.<sup>44</sup> Patronage was ‘relentlessly pursued’ and Oliver Cromwell made Lord High Steward in 1652.<sup>45</sup> However, controversies surrounding the borough’s authority in the wider region meant that the town was limited in its capacity to act as a social hub for county gentry. Frequent conflict between the corporation and the ‘Inshire’ (the two hundreds of Dudston and King’s Barton placed under Gloucester’s jurisdiction by King Richard III) lent a palpable strain to large scale public occasions.<sup>46</sup>

Taking into account both a predisposed constancy with a broader state agenda and a marked tendency toward localized corporate independence, it is unsurprising that ceremonial organizers at Gloucester worked to downplay any confusing or potentially problematic elements related to the proclamation of the new head of state. Most obviously, this meant

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<sup>43</sup> Peter Clark, ‘The Ramoth-Gilead of the good: urban change and political radicalism at Gloucester 1540-1640’, in Jonathan Barry, ed., *The Tudor and Stuart town: a reader in English urban history, 1530-1688* (Harlow, 1990), p. 270; J. N. Langston, ‘John Workman, puritan lecturer in Gloucester’, *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 66 (1947 for 1945), pp. 219-32, at pp. 220-1; Roy, ‘The English republic’, pp. 216, 231.

<sup>44</sup> Capp, *Culture wars*, pp. 234-6; Andrew Richard Warmington, *Civil war, interregnum and Restoration in Gloucestershire, 1640-1672* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 100, 103-4.

<sup>45</sup> Warmington, *Gloucestershire*, p. 105; Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC), *The records of the corporation of Gloucester* (London, 1891), pp. 505, 507, 514-15.

<sup>46</sup> Warmington, *Gloucestershire*, pp. 9, 13; N. M. Herbert, ed., *The Victoria county history of Gloucestershire: the city of Gloucester* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 87-8.

guiding the official response away from a simple repetition of earlier precedents. Indeed, at Oliver's second protectoral installation in 1657, the accompanying ceremonial had been much more extensive. Although the area in front of the Tolsey (town hall) remained a core focus on both occasions, the amount of money spent at the former date was almost three times that noted in 1658. The earlier event had also boasted an exhaustive catalogue of supplementary activities including the ringing of bells at the former cathedral, the employment of twelve 'poore men' who carried halberds in procession and the erection in the market place of an elevated platform made of '130 foote of boards' draped in red cloth.<sup>47</sup> No comparable entries were noted in the town at Richard's accession.

This time, a more modest expenditure was undertaken and the decision made to ring the bells only at the corporate church of St Michael's. The 1658 proclamation was thus placed into a more tightly controlled civic framework which tacitly negated many of the core features invoked at the previous event.<sup>48</sup> This may have been a conscious decision on the part of organizers to minimize confusion arising from comparison with regal forms and the placing of undue scrutiny on the logistics of Richard's claim to authority. Such reasoning may also explain the conspicuous absence of armed men in the ceremonies of the day.

As such, in 1657 wine had been purchased from corporate funds and given 'to the seu[er]all Companyes' of the militia. In September 1658, no similar expense was noted.<sup>49</sup> The lack of a martial presence might also reflect the corporation's recent heavy expense in raising troops in December 1657 and March 1658 after rumours of royalist uprisings and a Spanish invasion scare.<sup>50</sup> Either way, it appears that the rituals performed in the town were designed to limit any potential sources of controversy that might arise from unresolved tensions in both a national and a local framework. To the same end, the corporation went so far as to amend

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<sup>47</sup> GA, GBR/F4/6, fos. 193-4.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., fo. 264.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., fo. 194.

<sup>50</sup> Gloucester had been degarrisoned in 1653 following a period of tension between civic and soldierly factions in the town. Warmington, *Gloucestershire*, p. 105; HMC, *Gloucester*, pp. 502-4, 509-10, 515-16.

the draft of their address to Richard to omit reference to the 'well deserving souldiery' and correct the imprecise 'churches of Jesus' to the more direct and unambiguous 'cause & church of Christ'.<sup>51</sup> It is especially significant that this staunchly parliamentary community chose to maintain a more restrained ceremonial staging in light of the anti-soldier, anti-sectarian stance of local magistrates.

Plotting a ritual response at Gloucester was clearly a process which required the careful testing of appropriate forms and the targeted avoidance of unnecessary conflict. Whilst corporate governors still demonstrated a solid commitment to marking the transition as a core civic occasion, there remained room for considerable interpretive friction. This is most striking when we view the events of September 1658 in conjunction with those ordered for the marking of Oliver's second installation in 1657. Differences in the ritual constituents chosen at both occasions suggest that governors were relatively free to stage the succession in the way/s which made most sense to their particular surroundings.

Certainly, the requirement to provide some form of public commemoration forced town leaders to think through their relationship with central government and assess how best to maintain order in the vicinity. In the case of Gloucester, this meant moving the corporate response away from a simple repetition of the 1657 ceremonies and downplaying any potentially unsettling elements. Urban authorities thus approached the predicament of September 1658 as a practical means of communicating their moderate credentials and avoiding emphasising troubling associations with the army. By using the succession to signal attitudes in this way, town leaders referenced wider concerns over the role of the military, and, indeed, the possible reaction of the army to news of the succession. By extension, they also attempted to use the moment of regime change to protect their own status amidst an uncertain political future.

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<sup>51</sup> Warmington, *Gloucestershire*, p. 126; GA, GBR B3/3, fos. 87-8, 90-1.

#### IV

Significantly, however, the rituals noted at Gloucester were not indicative of those performed elsewhere. A number of corporations decided that the best way of communicating political support was through the staging of an elaborate and expensive public event. This was most often the case in those centres that maintained a more ambiguous relationship with state authorities and had a greater stake in confirming their 'loyalty' on a public stage. A case in point is Exeter. Here, despite a solid commitment to godly reformation, magistrates were initially contemptuous of republican government. Both of the city's MPs had been removed in Pride's Purge and the corporation reacted 'with unconcealed loathing' to the new regime. Early troubles were noted in 1649 when mayor James Gould refused to proclaim the commonwealth and boycotted the spring assizes. Whilst no formal purge occurred, a quarter of the corporation resigned or 'signalled their disaffection' in other ways. For example, paper copies of the Oath of Engagement were torn down from the guildhall in 1650 and their replacements 'smeared with excrement'.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to evidence of unrest within the urban magistracy, local clergy were equally hostile to interregnum government. In March 1650 they had refrained from announcing a fast day ordered by parliament and went 'all purposefully out of town' on the day itself. By way of explanation, licensed newsbook *A Perfect Diurnall* supplied the reasoning that 'the work of the Republique here is in a very languishing condition' with 'few appearing to promote the common interest'.<sup>53</sup> Although urban government did gradually turn toward cooperation with the state, the memory of Exeter's rebellious past ensured that local authorities had to work especially hard to safeguard positive relations with the centre. As

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<sup>52</sup> Capp, *Culture wars*, pp. 240-2.

<sup>53</sup> *A Perfect Diurnall*, 13 (4-11 Mar. 1650), pp. 109-10.



such, the opportunity to partake in a large-scale demonstration of political loyalty was approached as a vital necessity.

The rituals chosen to mark Richard's proclamation in the town borrowed core aspects from comparable regal occasions and were markedly similar to events in the capital. The news was first delivered to a select audience at the guildhall who joined a grand march with waits playing 'constantly for three hours' upon the roof of the building 'and three Trompeters constantly below'. The assembled then 'walkt in their formalities' about the town, proclaiming Richard five times in separate locations, gathering 'multitudes of people' as they went, who 'at each place, at the end of the proclamations, after the sound of the Trompets, cried out Amen'. This movement from street to street lasted until around two o'clock in the afternoon when 'all the Bells in the City continued Ringing till night' and 'the Bonfires began'.<sup>54</sup> The performance at Exeter enabled involvement from a broad spectrum of people outside of the formal corporate body. It also contributed to an ongoing process of civic legitimisation bound up in the spectacle of elite procession.

By bringing the moment of Richard's succession into focus with the particular agenda of Exeter magistrates in the later 1650s, we can more fully appreciate the predicament of their organisational choices. Indeed, by the time of Oliver's death in September 1658, the town was engaged in the application of a 'harsh disciplinary regime' focused particularly on the fervent reformation of popular morality. Staging an event such as the proclamation offered an opportunity to publically court a favourable relationship with the state. At the same time, however, it also provoked substantial anxiety over the maintenance of order in the vicinity.<sup>55</sup>

This is especially pertinent when we consider that local governors were engaged in an ongoing drive to police the behaviour of city residents. Alongside a strict campaign against drunkenness, targeted measures were taken to prevent insurrection at moments of communal

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<sup>54</sup> *Mercurius Politicus*, 433 (9-16 Sept. 1658), pp. 817-18; *State papers of John Thurloe*, VII, pp. 377-8.

<sup>55</sup> Capp, *Culture wars*, p. 251.

activity. A riotous gathering had failed to disperse at Christmas 1655 and the commemoration of Gunpowder Treason in 1657 saw a large crowd attack the watch and throw fireworks at the guildhall. These incidents were associated most obviously with unruly young men and, in March 1658, local authorities went so far as to build a cage in the cathedral close for the detainment of ‘any boys and youths’ that might cause disturbance at time of service.<sup>56</sup>

Considering both the troubled history of the corporation and the ongoing threat of internal insurrection, it is perhaps unsurprising that Exeter’s mayor, James Pearse, wrote to Thurloe to portray the smooth running of Richard’s proclamation in his town. In a letter dated 8 September 1658, Pearse recalled in detail the impressive enactment of the day’s events, placing particular stress on the peaceful and compliant involvement of ‘all the commoners and inhabitants’. On the morning of 7 September, the town waits had been sent ‘about all the streets of the citty’ to implore locals ‘to appeare at the proclayming’. The news itself was delivered at several of the ‘most eminent places’ including the East Gate and the Great Conduit. At each point ‘a mighty concourse of people’ leant their support through ‘great acclamations’.<sup>57</sup> By choosing to emphasize the extent of popular involvement in this way, Pearse demonstrated his continued subscription to the belief that, despite his fears, a popular presence was critical for ritual success.

Of course, inviting involvement from a broader section of society was a risky tactic. Any large gathering carried the threat of disorder and it was eminently possible that events might develop along an unplanned or unofficial trajectory. Such a point was clearly evidenced at the proclamation in Oxford when Colonel Unton Croke and his troops (alongside several members of the civic elite) were ‘pelted with carret and turnip-tops by

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 246.

<sup>57</sup> *State papers of John Thurloe*, ed. Birch, VII, pp. 377-8.

young scholars and others who stood at a distance'.<sup>58</sup> It appears that the ceremony here was otherwise successfully implemented with the news delivered 'at the usual places where kings have been proclaimed'.<sup>59</sup> Payments were made for 'cakes, wine, bonfire and beer', and refreshment laid aside for the enjoyment of assembled soldiers.<sup>60</sup> The presence of the military at Oxford was ostensibly embraced by town authorities despite resulting in a volatile backlash from the assembled crowds. This reflected both a practical means of securing order and a more symbolic depiction of corporate/military unity.

These examples effectively caution against ascribing a singular or conclusive ritual experience within an individual town. By their nature, urban centres were complex entities and the cultural worlds of their inhabitants comparably diverse. The requirement to mark the succession created an opportunity for multiple agendas to merge in a single commemorative pursuit. However, the meaning of the ritual remained unstable. The abuse of soldiers and corporation members at Oxford demonstrates how clashes over different versions of 'the town' could be played out through conflicting appropriations of ceremonial convention.<sup>61</sup> The representation of harmony through the peaceful presence of the military *could* result in the temporary camouflaging of intrinsic tensions. At the same time, however, ritual vocabularies remained open to manipulation and public occasions continued to provoke concern over unregulated participants and the threat of insurgency. These anxieties seem to be more loosely centred on a general fear of the unchecked potential of large-scale gatherings than a direct reflection of the specific circumstances of the succession. Further evidence to this end

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<sup>58</sup> M. G. Hobson and H. E. Salter, eds., *Oxford council acts, 1626-1665* (Oxford, 1933), p. 441; *The life and times of Anthony Wood, antiquary, of Oxford, 1632-1696, described by himself*, ed. A. Clark (4 vols., Oxford, 1891-5), I, p. 259.

<sup>59</sup> *Life and times of Anthony Wood*, ed. Clark, I, p. 259.

<sup>60</sup> Hobson and Salter, eds., *Oxford council acts*, p. 441.

<sup>61</sup> For further discussion on the capacity for public ritual to engender conflict over the use of urban space see Phil Withington, 'Citizens, soldiers and urban culture in Restoration England', *English Historical Review*, 123 (2008), pp. 587-610; Johnathan Barry, 'Communicating with authority: the uses of script, print and speech in Bristol 1640-1714', in Julia C. Crick and Alexandra Walsham, eds., *The uses of script and print, 1300-1700* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 202, 204.

can be found with reference to the ceremonies staged in another centre of religious and political complexity, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Defending the town against rebellion had gained a particular currency in the 1650s as reports emerged of royalist sympathies amongst a number of core citizens.<sup>62</sup> Rumours of plots heightened fears that Newcastle might be taken by the enemy and orders were given in 1655 for four companies to be made of the 'best affected townsmen' to ensure its safety.<sup>63</sup> These tensions were not so easily abated and, in February 1657, General George Monk relayed his concerns to the lord protector that the town, having 'noe garrison in itt, and many people disaffected', was a dangerous weak spot for the nation.<sup>64</sup> Later that year alderman Leonard Carr was removed from office for harbouring royalist sympathies.<sup>65</sup>

In light of these instabilities, the requirement to perform the proclamation in the town provided a critical opportunity for the corporation to prove their loyalty on a national stage. It also supplied the more immediate challenge of policing popular involvement and fostering an image of secure local government. As with Pearse in Exeter, common councillor Thomas Errington wrote to Thurloe on 6 September to convey the peaceful course of events. After relaying the speed and solemnity of the reading, he reassured his recipient that 'I heare not one person as yet speake against his highness, nor your lordship's proclamation'. Moreover, he was keen to communicate his vigilance in policing potential disorder and reassured Thurloe that 'if anything fall out in these partes' he would 'crave leave to acquaint your lordship, what is [his] power'.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Capp, *Culture wars*, p. 49.

<sup>63</sup> Eneas Mackenzie, *Historical account of Newcastle-upon-Tyne including the borough of Gateshead* (2 vols., Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1827), I, p. 40.

<sup>64</sup> *State papers of John Thurloe*, ed. Birch, VI, p. 284.

<sup>65</sup> MacKenzie, *Newcastle*, p. 41; Roger Howell, 'Newcastle and the nation: the seventeenth-century experience', in Johnathan Barry, ed., *The Tudor and Stuart town: a reader in English urban history, 1530-1688* (Harlow, 1990), pp. 285-6.

<sup>66</sup> *State papers of John Thurloe*, ed. Birch, VII, p. 377.

The report of the proclamation noted in *The Publick Intelligencer* cited the ‘very great Solemnity’ of the day itself and underscored that ‘The entertaining of his Highness Succession here hath been as affectionate as in any other part of the Nation’. This printed account also made reference to the piety of ‘some good People’ who, upon hearing of Oliver’s ill health, had assembled to keep a ‘Private Fast ... to seek the Lord if it should please him to prolong the daies of his Highness life’. At news of the old protector’s death, however, they ‘turned their prayers to the Lord, to implore a blessing upon his Successor’.<sup>67</sup> By merging the reporting of the rituals staged with the sadness felt at the death of the outgoing leader, the town’s response was situated most firmly in a framework of solemn piety which managed the threat of popular hostility and disorder.

As at Exeter, the reporting of ceremonies to the secretary of state in this instance is indicative of perceived insecurities within the locality and marked instabilities in the town’s relationship with central authorities. Indeed, Errington was especially careful to outline how news of the proclamation was ‘immediately delivered’ to the deputy mayor who promptly ‘sent for Mr. recorder, the aldermen, and severall of the common councill ... and forthwith his highness was proclaimed in state’. In addition to the speed noted in this report, watches were ‘sett at every gaite in towne’ and, that evening, ‘Mr. mayor and others went the rounds’ to ensure that order was properly maintained. Errington further elaborated that ‘every alderman goes the round at night, and sees the gaites be well locked in; and the watchmen, 6 at every gaite, doe their duties’.<sup>68</sup> The attention to policing urban space and ensuring the good behaviour of its residents reveals that the civic elite at Newcastle were clearly linking the moment of the proclamation with the potential for popular insurrection. The staging of succession remained an unstable occasion which *could* be used to court favourable relations

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<sup>67</sup> *The Publick Intelligencer*, 143 (13-20 Sept. 1658), p. 826.

<sup>68</sup> *State papers of John Thurloe*, ed. Birch, VII, p. 377.

with central government. At the same time, however, it continued to threaten irrepressible disorder.

## V

Despite the gravity of these concerns, local governors across the country were still able to use the situation of September 1658 to further corporate interests in more complex and unique ways. This finding supports work on corporate independence in the 1650s which has stressed the capacity for towns to pursue ‘their own particular agendas’ with a significant degree of confidence and agency. Indeed, Ian Archer argued that republican rule in fact offered a ‘period of stabilisation’ in which urban centres ‘could reap many rewards’.<sup>69</sup> Ian Roy has shown how godly towns in the 1650s were left relatively free to pursue ambitious plans for social, political and religious reformation in their respective locales. Moreover, corporate officers used the built environment and the processes of ceremony and display to foster ‘civic pride and unity’.<sup>70</sup> Stephen K. Roberts revealed how towns in the Severn Basin reacted with remarkable adaptability to changed political circumstances and were able to actively exploit relations with the centre to ‘achieve their civic aspirations’.<sup>71</sup> Phil Withington has stressed the incidence of ‘sustained urbanisation’ across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, emphasising the importance of the local setting in shaping experience in the various ‘city

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<sup>69</sup> Ian Archer, ‘Politics and government, 1540-1700’, in Peter Clark, ed., *The Cambridge urban history of Britain: volume 2, 1540-1840* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 254.

<sup>70</sup> Roy, ‘English republic’, pp. 214-15, 234, 237.

<sup>71</sup> For example, Gloucester petitioned parliament to make the former-cathedral a parish church under city ownership. Coventry and Bristol pursued grants for parkland and to obtain special trading privileges. See Stephen K. Roberts, ‘Cromwellian towns in the Severn Basin: a contribution to cis-Atlantic history?’, in Patrick Little, ed., *The Cromwellian protectorate* (Woodbridge, 2007), p. 180; Idem., ‘State and society in the English revolution’, in Michael J. Braddick, ed., *The Oxford handbook of the English revolution* (Oxford, 2015), p. 307. For the classic work on corporate independence in this period, see B. L. K. Henderson, ‘The commonwealth charters’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Third Series, 6 (1912), pp. 129-62.

commonwealths' across the country.<sup>72</sup> With reference to York in the revolutionary period, Withington noted that the citizenry enjoyed 'unprecedented levels of empowerment' and were able to oversee the extension of 'an assertive and reformatory civic republicanism'.<sup>73</sup> These readings of a growth in self-awareness and self-regulation challenge more traditional narratives of urban experience in the 1650s as typified by the overwhelming pressure of state interference.<sup>74</sup>

The research presented in this article develops this work by emphasising how towns were able to use public ritual as a critical tool for the negotiation of challenges in both a national and local framework. Further evidence to this end can be seen with reference to the staging of Richard's proclamation in York where magistrates were committed to safeguarding the interests of their city 'by maintaining a friendly relationship with central government'.<sup>75</sup> Following a corporate purge in 1645, the logistics of local power remained relatively stable and no member resigned after the execution of the king in January 1649.<sup>76</sup> The 'co-operative stance' of the corporation was motivated most obviously by a practical need to safeguard privileges in the face of an uncertain political future. Once again, the rituals of regime change were clearly internalized as a useful opportunity to court the approval of the new lord protector through the public presentation of political loyalty. Crucially, however, the occasion also held implications for urban experience on a much more immediate scale.

The ceremony itself was led by mayor Robert Horner and Sir Thomas Widdrington, recorder of the town and lord chief baron of the exchequer. Widdrington was a high-profile figure in the region who had acted as speaker of the House of Commons in 1656 and taken a

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<sup>72</sup> Phil Withington, *The politics of commonwealth: citizens and freemen in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 5-7, 98.

<sup>73</sup> Withington, 'Citizens, soldiers and urban culture', p. 609; Withington, 'Views from the bridge', pp. 135, 140.

<sup>74</sup> For example, see Peter Clark and Paul Slack, *English towns in transition, 1500-1700* (London, 1976), p. 138.

<sup>75</sup> Capp, *Culture wars*, p. 39; Withington, 'Views from the bridge', pp. 125-6, 133.

<sup>76</sup> David Scott, 'Politics and government in York, 1640-1662', in R. C. Richardson, ed., *Town and countryside in the English revolution* (Manchester, 1992), pp. 50-9.

prominent role in the campaign to urge Oliver to accept to crown in 1657.<sup>77</sup> His centrality to the enactment of Richard's proclamation was utilized to enhance projections of honour rooted to the prominence of the urban centre in its wider locale. Thus, the presentation of the ceremony here on 7 September followed a similar pattern to that noted in the capital with an impressive procession setting out from the guildhall 'with the Aldermen, Sheriffs, Common Council, and a very full Assembly of the best Citizens'. Local magistrates in their scarlet and 'mounted on horseback' moved first to the market place 'accompanied by the Companies of the City, in their proper Habits and Formalities used upon such solemn occasions'.<sup>78</sup> This latter reference suggests that the event was more explicitly informed by existing modes of practice than it had been at Gloucester.

Moreover, several familiar elements used at previous royal inaugurations were cited as appearing at strategic intervals throughout the day. In addition to Richard being referred to as 'his Highness ... our most Noble Prince', local trumpeters and city waits were employed to lend their services and a raised platform built in the market place to elevate the corporation above the crowds.<sup>79</sup> It appears that governors at York made sense of the particular circumstance of Richard's accession by calling to mind the memory of comparably grand occasions in their own recent history. Despite the reluctance of citizens in other towns to draw attention to previously utilized ritual forms, similar tactics were employed elsewhere to lend order and cohesion through the moment of performance.

For example, Sir Thomas Herbert, clerk of the protector's council at Dublin, noted that the ceremonies at Kilkenny eclipsed the 'proclaiming of Queen Elizabeth, King James, and King Charles'. For those old enough to remember, 'there were upon this occasion more signs of joy and satisfaction, and the service was performed with more solemnity and

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<sup>77</sup> Scott, 'Widdrington, Sir Thomas', *ODNB*.

<sup>78</sup> *Public Intelligencer*, 142 (6-13 Sept. 1658), pp. 813-14.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*.



handsomeness, then any of their was'.<sup>80</sup> Interestingly, Herbert made no mention of the precedent set by Oliver's 1653 or 1657 installations. Rather, focus was placed directly on previous royal incarnations which paled in comparison to the splendour of Richard's elevation.

Certainly, many urban rituals of September 1658 utilized spaces and symbols associated with earlier monarchic occasions to underscore the honour of the corporation alongside that of the protector. Colonel Smith, governor of Hull, relayed how the day had been marked in his town 'with such solemnity as is usuall in cases of that nature'. Once again, this point reveals a tacit confidence in the fact that such an exceptional occasion could be easily integrated into established modes of practice.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, the ceremonies noted at Edinburgh were devised to mimic 'the Tenor of the Proclamation passed in England'. A 'great deal of State and Ceremonie' was enjoyed at the High Cross with local magistrates elevated above the crowds as 'Bells rang, and Bonfires were made'.<sup>82</sup> Rather than demonstrating the existence of a generic 'English' response, this inclusion most likely referenced the general majesty of the rituals staged in the capital. In a comparable way to the performances noted in Exeter or York, reports from the town looked to emphasize the impressive nature of elite involvement in eminent city space to underscore the prestige of the locality. It seems evident that local governors in a range of contexts were able to actively exploit the power of ritual precedent to enhance the standing of the town in its wider setting.

Following Oliver's protectoral inauguration in 1653, York's mayor John Geldart had sent an address to the lord protector which made specific reference to the loss of the town's former status and begged him to look favourably 'upon the Honour and Privileges of this antient City, whose Strength is much decay'd'. By way of elaboration, Geldart explained that 'Our Lot is fallen something remote from the great Scene of public Affairs, which hath been

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<sup>80</sup> *Mercurius Politicus*, 436 (30 Sept. - 7 Oct. 1658), pp. 881-4.

<sup>81</sup> *State papers of John Thurloe*, ed. Birch, VII, p. 376.

<sup>82</sup> *Mercurius Politicus*, 433 (9-16 Sept. 1658), pp. 831-2.

prejudicial to us'.<sup>83</sup> The ritual splendour of Richard's proclamation can be situated in this broader context of civic reformation in York that saw the corporation struggle against the loss of its former status as provincial capital, seat of an archbishop and headquarters of the Council of the North. The opportunity provided in September 1658 intersected with an ongoing programme of cultural regeneration which facilitated the attempt to regain lost regional eminence through the symbolic confirmation of historic prestige.<sup>84</sup> In contrast to the actions of authorities at Gloucester, this meant using the memory of older ritual precedents to communicate both the esteem of the civic body and the urban centre over which they presided.

## VI

Building upon these findings, our final point of discussion considers the use of the proclamation in negotiating the relationship between civic and military authorities. This situation directly reflected contemporary concerns over the place of soldiers in the political nation. In September 1658, the army was unsettled and trying to protect their position against the perceived impositions of a new and inexperienced leader. An impasse seemed increasingly likely. Henry Cromwell's response that he wished the army to be 'so governed, that the world may never hear of them, unless there be occasion to fight' was indicative of broader tensions surrounding the role of actual soldiers in the processes state government.<sup>85</sup> Despite these concerns, the portrayal of peaceful military involvement remained a core feature of the proclamation in towns across the country.

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<sup>83</sup> W. Sandby, ed., *The parliamentary or constitutional history of England* (23 vols., London, 1751-61), XX, pp. 278-9.

<sup>84</sup> Capp, *Culture wars*, p. 228; Withington, 'Citizens, soldiers and urban culture', pp. 590, 608.

<sup>85</sup> *State papers of John Thurloe*, ed. Birch, VII, p. 455.

In light of the particular situation of the army at the time of Oliver's death, it is unsurprising that the state-sponsored reporting of public rituals would look to emphasize the willing involvement of soldiers.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, the rituals staged in Dublin were taken by Henry Cromwell to be evidence of 'the speedy compliance of the army, whose obedience your highness may justly require at my hands'.<sup>87</sup> Elsewhere, emblems of military support were effectively exploited to craft an image of political harmony which benefitted both the state itself and the state of urban government.

The account of Henry Smith at Hull informed Thurloe that the 'officers and souldiers' were 'soe well satisfyed with what is done, that they doe unanimously resolve to stand by, and to live and dy with his highness'.<sup>88</sup> Commentary in *The Publick Intelligencer* noted that the proclamation was performed here to 'the great satisfaction and joy of all, both Town and Garrison'.<sup>89</sup> Numerous other accounts claimed to represent good conduct between military and civic bodies. After the news had been given at Shrewsbury on 13 September, it was resolved that the mayor and aldermen would treat 'the sheriff and gentlemen' to 'a great banquet' while 'the sheriff and governour' entertained 'the souldiers'. The whole business was managed in tandem by 'the Governour, the sheriff, and the Major Wareing, captain of the county troop'.<sup>90</sup> At Honiton in East Devon, the local militia turned out to support the town with 'as much ceremony as they could' with 'all souldiers and others' engaging 'most faithfully to serve his highnesse'.<sup>91</sup> The rituals in Norwich saw the corporation joined by militia men for 'the better solempnizati[o]n of the worke'.<sup>92</sup> At Worcester, the announcement was attended by 'a gallant troop of horse; and after the Proclamation many volleys of shot

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<sup>86</sup> For further discussion on the position of the army in this context see Henry Reece, *The army in Cromwellian England, 1649-1660* (Oxford, 2013), p. 192; Smith, 'English politics in the 1650s', pp. 188, 196-7.

<sup>87</sup> *State papers of John Thurloe*, ed. Birch, VII, p. 400.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 376.

<sup>89</sup> *The Publick Intelligencer*, 143 (13-20 Sept. 1658), p. 827.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 825.

<sup>91</sup> *State papers of John Thurloe*, ed. Birch, VII, p. 385.

<sup>92</sup> NRO, NCR Case 16a/23, fo. 84r.

were given, and several grand Acclamations of the people'.<sup>93</sup> Following the delivery of the news at Bristol, volunteers 'brought the Mayor to his House, and then returned to their several homes'. All of this was accompanied by 'the firing of many great guns in the Marsh, ringing of bells, bonfires, and discharging of the great Guns in the ships'.<sup>94</sup> The use of both militia men and professional soldiers referenced the army's support for the new head of state and the capacity for harmony between military and civic bodies in the town itself.

Urban authorities thus appeared to have actively used the succession to try and signal their attitudes towards the army and calibrate an appropriate response to Richard given the potential risk of army opposition. Public ritual was once again approached as a pragmatic tool with which to navigate a challenging political predicament. We can see these themes at work most clearly with reference to our final case study, King's Lynn.

This was another centre of strategic import that had acted as a strong base of parliamentary support during the civil wars. Close trading links with the capital necessitated the maintenance of favourable relations with central government in order to safeguard prosperity and independence.<sup>95</sup> The town also supported a garrison which had been re-established in 1655. The fragility of military-civilian relationships came to a head in 1657 at the ceremonies marking Oliver's second protectoral inauguration. Although order had been given for corporate officers to attend alongside 'all the companies of Soldiers in their Armes', town marshal William Dumbelow had chosen to excuse himself and remained conspicuously absent. Although we do not have evidence of precise motivations, the fallout from this event suggests that Dumbelow's nonattendance may have been intended as a statement of anti-army opposition. He certainly caused 'very great offence' to both parties by ignoring 'the

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<sup>93</sup> *The Publick Intelligencer*, 143 (13-20 Sept. 1658), pp. 817-18.

<sup>94</sup> *Mercurius Politicus*, 433 (9-16 Sept. 1658), p. 830.

<sup>95</sup> Capp, *Culture wars*, p. 233. The town had a long history of problematic public ritual. It was one of the few places in the country to have marked the accession of Lady Jane Grey in 1553 and was subsequently sued by the Marian regime, eventually receiving royal pardon for its misdemeanour. John Gough Nichols, ed., *The chronicle of Queen Jane, and of two years of Queen Mary* (London, 1801), pp. 110-4; Barrett L. Beer, *Rebellion and riot: popular disorder in England during the reign of Edward VI* (Kent, OH, 2005), p. xx.

command of Mr Mayor and Captain White'. Moreover, the corporation clearly internalized the incident as a serious affront to local security and swiftly removed Dumbelow from office. The motivation of this decision was cited as avoiding a situation 'whereby a difference hath beene likely to arise betweene the officers of this gairison and this towne'.<sup>96</sup>

For governors at King's Lynn, then, the predicament of Oliver's second installation had presented a means of negotiating limited autonomy and attempting to unite civic and military bodies. Dumbelow's misdemeanour threatened not just the success of ceremonial display but the security of the whole town. This incident clearly demonstrates that the marking of regime change was intended by ritual orchestrators to strengthen links between centre and locality whilst also fostering stability *within* the town itself. Further evidence to this end is provided with reference to the rituals chosen to commemorate Richard's proclamation in the town.

An account from the corporation later published in *The Publick Intelligencer* outlined how the news was delivered 'with all the solemnity, that in so short a time could possibly be done'. In contrast to the fallout from Dumbelow's offence, special effort was made to present an image of ordered and harmonious involvement from both soldierly and civic factions. Indeed, local governors moved in procession from the town hall to perform the proclamation only 'when the Soldiers both horse and foot' had lined the route. Shots were fired after the news was made and 'the whole Company' did, 'in a very solemn manner', move 'through the heart of the town' to repeat their pains 'in other accustomed places'.<sup>97</sup> Reports duly emphasized the potential for concord between both groups and popular joy was noted as being expressed most effectively through both 'the shouting of the people' *and* 'the shooting of the Soldiery'.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> HMC, *The manuscripts of the corporations of Southampton and King's Lynn* (London, 1887), p. 183.

<sup>97</sup> *The Publick Intelligencer*, 144 (20-27 Sept. 1658), p. 854.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

The staging of Richard's succession at King's Lynn presented a welcome opportunity to confront instabilities in a local context. As oppose to the ceremonies enacted in Gloucester, but in accordance with those cited at York, the rituals chosen seem to have been more explicitly informed by the precedent of other recent successions. This point may well be a reflection of the centrality of the garrison in the town and the pressing desire of the corporation to smooth frictions between civic and soldierly elements. Significantly, the address sent from the corporation to the protector in 1658 made reference to both the unanimity of support ('with the consent and concurrence of the commonalty of the said burgh') and the specific legality of the transition 'according to law and the said humble petition and advice'.<sup>99</sup> In contrast to their counterparts in Gloucester, the corporation of King's Lynn were thus able to demonstrate that they could utilize both the memory of Oliver's second installation and the ordered involvement of a military presence to lend meaning and foster stability. Once again, this example suggests that there was no definitive blueprint for staging the succession in urban space but that a range of individuals were able to interact creatively with the requirement to formulate a suitable ritual response.

## VII

This article has shown how the public ceremonies marking the accession of Richard Cromwell to the office of lord protector in September 1658 enabled urban governors to approach the moment of regime change actively and pragmatically. This was a situation that could be used to foster civic pride, encourage the maintenance of peaceful order and/or garner favour with national government. The moment of the proclamation was an opportunity for contemporaries to engage with traditional celebratory practices through the enactment of

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<sup>99</sup> HMC, *Southampton and King's Lynn*, p. 183.

familiar festive vocabularies. Just as they had done on countless other special days, bells rang out, bonfires burned, sermons were preached and the corporation processed. Any event utilized for the confirmation of strong links between centre and locality, however, could also provoke serious concern. The formal proclamation of the new protector was a symbolic moment when political opposition might most naturally be made manifest. Whilst ritual commemorations themselves were not necessarily the main point of friction, they provided an immediate and unavoidable source of tension. The marking of regime change posed a significant dilemma to town officials who feared insurrection but were forced to rely on a vast and potentially boisterous popular presence. Additionally, the application of old precedents in a new context invested the articulation of the ceremony with substantial strain. Despite the essentially ambiguous role of ritual performance in this context, it remained eminently possible for civic governors to harness the moment of succession to formulate a statement on the nature of power and authority in their respective locales.

This research has emphasized that printed and performative demonstrations of loyalty do not map onto each other in any simplistic way. Although there are similarities in certain key features stressed, for example, the proud description of York's pedigree as an 'antient City' or the actions of Gloucester magistrates in downplaying associations with the army, the tone, promptness, and content are not conclusively translatable.<sup>100</sup> As outlined above, the texts delivered to the lord protector and later committed to print are remarkably formulaic. There is little space for individual civic flair and few examples where authors depart from a set model of congratulatory devotion. Moreover, time constraints do not seem to be as pressing with many towns waiting several months to craft their response.<sup>101</sup> In contrast, by examining the actual staging of the proclamation in urban space (and placing these actions

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<sup>100</sup> *Mercurius Politicus*, 435 (23-30 Sept. 1658), pp. 889-90; Warmington, *Gloucestershire*, p. 126; GA, GBR B3/3, fos. 87-8, 90-1.

<sup>101</sup> See, for example, *Mercurius Politicus*, 549 (6-13 Jan. 1659), pp. 155-6; *Mercurius Politicus*, 550 (13-20 Jan. 1659), pp. 171-2; *Mercurius Politicus*, 551 (20-27 Jan. 1658), pp. 186-7; *Mercurius Politicus*, 557 (3-10 Mar. 1659), pp. 276-7; *Mercurius Politicus*, 559 (17-24 Mar. 1659), pp. 308-9.

into a wider interpretive context), we can gain a more nuanced perspective on the response of specific towns to the precise moment of regime change.

In light of the political strain which wracked the later years of the regime, local authorities approached Richard's proclamation as a way of smoothing over possible problems and/or advancing particular local agendas. We should be careful not to overstate the clarity of ritual expectation during this period. Such a point holds important implications for our understanding of cultural practice in the 1650s town more broadly. It reveals that, even in intensely challenging and unfamiliar circumstances, symbolic display could be used to attempt to convey legitimacy and instil unity on multiple levels. This evidence challenges older narratives which categorized the period after Oliver's death as one marked by an inexorable slide toward Restoration.<sup>102</sup> Whilst scholarship has now refuted any simplistic reading of inevitability, the incidence of substantial autonomy in formulating and enacting a ritual response complicates our understanding of this situation in new and interesting ways.<sup>103</sup> Most obviously, it reveals how urban governors were able to pragmatically manage their own reaction to the moment of succession to safeguard corporate authority and engage with a range of more imminently pressing concerns.

In short, there remained a general recognition that ceremonial forms constituted a critical means of validating authority on a public stage. It was not always clear how to modify old practices to make them applicable and an increased level of strain was demonstrably placed on the articulation of large-scale ritual moments. In spite of these concerns, however, a focus on the specific situation of September 1658 exposes the continued potential for public

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<sup>102</sup> *The writings and speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. Wilbur Cortez Abbott (4 vols., Cambridge, MA, 1937-47), IV, p. 866; James Rees Jones, 'Booth's rising of 1659', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 39 (1957), pp. 416-33, at p. 416; Everitt, *Community of Kent*, p. 302.

<sup>103</sup> See, for example, Coward, *Cromwellian protectorate*, pp. 4-5; H. F. McMains, *The death of Oliver Cromwell* (Kentucky, 2000), p. 4; Gerald Edward Aylmer, *The interregnum: the quest for settlement, 1646-1660* (London, 1972), p. 187.



ritual to be approached as a vital facet of a distinctly *urban* experience in a changed, and changing, political context.